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CONTINUING THE SEARCH FOR FIRST KNOWN SHIPWRECK OFF WESTERN CALIFORNIA COAST

The second phase of a multi-year project to survey and identify underwater archeological resources of Drakes Bay within Point Reyes National Seashore and the Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary begins during the week of September 21st and will continue until mid-October. The project is a joint partnership between Point Reyes National Seashore, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary, and the California State Lands Commission and is sponsored and funded by private and public agencies.

Organizations providing assistance to the project include San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park, National Maritime Museum Association, Institute for Western Maritime Archeology, Point Reyes National Seashore Association, Farallones Marine Sanctuary Association, Drake Navigators Guild, University of California at Berkeley, and Sonoma State University.

The primary objectives of this phase of the research are:

- to develop information for long-term preservation of resources in Drakes Bay;
- to conduct additional underwater remote sensing surveys and compare data to last year's results; and
- to locate the Manila Galleon, *San Agustin*, a Manila Galleon lost during the Cermeño expedition in 1595.

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In 1982 and 1983, the National Park Service conducted an underwater remote sensing survey for the submerged lands of Drakes Bay, the Point Reyes Headlands, and the Great Beach. A number of historic shipwrecks were located and documented, but not the *San Agustin*. The team also noted magnetic anomalies in an area that historic records indicate is a high probability zone for the location of the *San Agustin*.

Point Reyes and Drakes Bay were vital regions in the early historical development of the San Francisco Bay Area, and were the location of numerous shipwrecks. The earliest shipwreck dates from the period of colonial exploration when the Spanish Manila Galleon *San Agustin* was lost in Drakes Bay in 1595. This three-masted ship was probably about 80 feet long and 200 tons. She was turned over to Captain Sebastian Rodriguez Cermeño who had been sent from Mexico to explore the coast of Northern California and confirm reports of the discoveries of Sir Francis Drake sixteen years earlier. There are at least 72 other marine disasters recorded during the period 1840 to 1940, resulting in at least 30 wrecks in the area, with over 30 in Drakes Bay or on the Point Reyes headlands.

There is very little question concerning whether or not Sebastian Rodriguez Cermeño lost the *San Agustin* in 1595 in what is now known as Drakes Bay. The reason for this comparatively high level of confidence in Cermeño's presence in the area is that there is a personal written account of his journey down the California coastline from the location where his vessel was lost while he and most of his crew were on shore.

To verify the location of the *San Agustin* would be of particular significance to both researchers and resource managers. Shipwrecks represent unique historical events of particular importance not only to historians, but to social scientists. Our present-day understanding of pre-19th century ship construction, maritime culture, and shipboard interaction is quite poor. Therefore, test excavations of a 16th-century merchant ship, especially a ship involved in overseas trade with Manila, would provide invaluable data.

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The National Park Service and the National Marine Sanctuary are stewards of many of America's most important cultural, natural, and recreational resources. These are agencies charged with preserving the resources unimpaired for the enjoyment of present and future generations. The material evidence of past human activities is finite and nonrenewable. Such tangible resources begin to deteriorate almost from the moment of their creation. This project allows us to preserve, protect, and interpret the cultural heritage of our nation to the public.

Please visit our expanded website at www.nps.gov/pore and visit the California Fedpage at fedpage.doi.nps for information on all Federal natural resource agencies in California.

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